

**RELIGION AND THE TRUE-SELF: IS RELIGION A FACTOR IN THE
DETERMINATION OF THE TRUE-SELF?**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

STEPHANIE LEAL

Submitted to Honors and Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial of requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by
Research Advisor:

Dr. Rebecca Schlegel

May 2013

Major: Psychology

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	1
ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	4
II METHOD.....	8
Participants.....	8
Materials and Procedure.....	8
III RESULTS.....	10
Preliminary Analyses.....	10
Primary Analyses.....	10
IV CONCLUSION.....	13
Discussion.....	13
Conclusion.....	16
REFERENCES.....	17

ABSTRACT

Religion and the True-Self: Is Religion a Factor in Determination of the True-Self? (May 2013)

Stephanie Leal
Department of Psychology
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Rebecca Schlegel
Department of Psychology

The relationship between religion and the self has long been discussed. The current project specifically examines the way religious beliefs relate to the feeling that people know their true selves. I hypothesize that strong religious beliefs can foster the feeling that one knows who he/she really is. To test this idea, an experiment was conducted that manipulated people's confidence in their religious beliefs and then assessed their perceived true self-knowledge. Results revealed that, consistent with predictions, people who were led to question their confidence in their religious beliefs reported less perceived true self-knowledge than their counterparts who were not led to question their confidence in their religious beliefs. By comparison, perceived knowledge of other self-aspects (actual, ideal) was unaffected by the manipulation. This suggests that religion can serve as a source of self-knowledge, particularly knowledge of the *true* self. The implications of this relationship provide a better understanding of the various aspects of these different self-concepts and of the relationship between religion and the self.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Rebecca Schlegel, my advisor and professor, for her constant encouragement and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank her for sharing her passion for research and statistics with me.

Additionally, I would like to thank Christina Smith for walking me through the research process and being available to help me if I ever needed it. I appreciate all the knowledge you've shared with me and all of the time you spent helping me.

I would also like to thank William Davis, Kelly Hirsch, Elizabeth Seto and Jinhyung Kim, the graduate students in the Shlicks Personality and Self Process Lab, for encouraging my interest in research, providing helpful information and being available for assistance.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The true self is typically viewed as set of innate, immutable characteristics that the individual needs to discover within him or herself in order to live a fulfilling life (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011). Consistent with this idea, recent research has revealed that feelings of true self-knowledge (i.e., the feeling that one does or does not know who he or she really is inside) predict well-being in general (Kernis & Goldman, 2005; 2006) and meaning in life judgments specifically (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011; Schlegel, Vess, & Arndt, 2012).

Considering that feelings of true self-knowledge impact well-being, it is important to ask where these feelings of true self-knowledge might come from. That is, how do individuals decide whether or not they have discovered their true self? Research is just now beginning to examine the origins of perceived true self-knowledge. One recent study revealed that decision satisfaction is an important source of feelings of true self-knowledge (Schlegel, Hicks, Davis, Hirsch, & Smith, 2012). Specifically, this research demonstrated that people possess a “true-self-as-guide lay” theory of decision making that suggests true self-knowledge is a prerequisite for making satisfying decisions. As a consequence, perceived true self-knowledge and decision satisfaction are bidirectionally linked, such that the evaluation of one naturally spills over to the other. Thus, decision satisfaction is used as cue that the true self must be known, because how would you have made that satisfying decision if you didn’t know your true self? The purpose of my proposed study is to extend this exploration of the antecedents of perceived true-self knowledge.

Specifically, I propose that religious beliefs might be another antecedent of perceived true-self knowledge. Religious beliefs have been a constant in human history since early societies and reflect a desire to integrate with a larger and more complex unit (i.e., a higher power; Emmons, 2005). In this way, people have used religion to explain things they are unable to completely understand. Considering that identity formation is an inherently difficult process for people to understand (Schlegel, Vess, & Arndt, 2011), they may turn to religion for guidance. Spiritual strivings are likely to provide support and stability to this search for the self by reminding people about what is ultimately important to them (Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998). That is, religiosity is likely to provide answers to the question “who am I?”. The role of religion in the self is further supported by perspectives on identity development.

The identity stage of development centers mainly on the progression from childhood to adulthood (i.e., adolescence and young adult hood). During this stage, individuals form a personalized stable sense of self, and establish themselves with a useful role in society. Thus, young adults are believed to be seeking personal and social validation for their choice of career and devotion to a set of beliefs (e.g. political values; religious creed). Faith development thus incorporates issues essential to identity such as the potential for change across the life span as well as your place within a social context. (Leak, 2009).

Spiritual development can be observed as concerning inner experiences (a connection to the unseen) and outward experiences (reflections in daily behavior, and relationships). Development then involves intricate interactions between these variables and the individual developmental

process (Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Scales, 2011). Because scientific interest in the study of perceived true self-knowledge is a relatively recent development in the literature, the potential effects of spirituality on perceived true-self knowledge remain unexamined. Investigating the relationship between these constructs may provide valuable contributions to society as well as our scientific understanding.

In order to examine the effect religious beliefs may have on perceived true self-knowledge, I will manipulate religious confidence via a metacognitive ease paradigm. This paradigm originated with research that demonstrated that the ease of recall of moments of assertiveness is a contributing factor to personal perceived levels of assertiveness or non-assertiveness.

Specifically Schwarz and colleagues (1991) conducted a 2x2 study that manipulated a recall task to be easy or difficult by asking participants to generate either 6 (easy) or 12 (difficult) moments of being either very assertive or very unassertive. The results revealed that difficulty of recall negatively predicted perceived assertiveness or non-assertiveness (Schwarz, Bless, Strack, Klumpp, Rittenauer-Schatka, & Simons, 1991). For example, people who listed 12 examples of being assertive, rated themselves as being less assertive than people who listed 6 examples. This is somewhat counterintuitive given that people in the 12 example condition actually generated *more* examples of being assertive. This research established that the metacognitive ease with which something is recalled (i.e. the experience of the recall task being easy or difficult) can actually trump the number of examples generated as information when people make judgments.

Based on this research we similarly attempted to manipulate religious confidence by asking participants to generate reasons they hold their particular religious beliefs. We anticipated that

participants in the difficult condition would temporarily experience a sense of doubt about their religious beliefs. This sense of doubt then can be used to assess the effect of religious confidence on perceived true self knowledge.

In the current study, we will use our adaptation of Schwarz's listing task to attempt to manipulate religious confidence. After the listing task, participants will self report information on how much they know about three different self-concepts (true, actual and ideal). Additional exploratory measures and demographics will also be included in the survey to control for other potential factors.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and forty-five participants enrolled in an introductory psychology course at Texas A&M University participated for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Participants' gender distribution was relatively even (female=72, male=71, unknown=2), age ranged from 18 to 22 ($M=18.65$, $SD=.87$). Participants were predominantly white (80.7%) and non-Hispanic (81.4%). Participants' religious affiliations varied, however the vast majority expressed some type of religious belief (89.7%) with the remaining participants reporting as atheist/agnostic (7.6%) or electing not to specify (2.8%).

Materials and procedure

Upon arrival, participants were escorted to a private computer and were informed that they would be participating in a study that explores the way that people describe and think about different aspects of the self. Participants then completed the measures described below, as well as several measures outside of the scope of the current report.

Religious confidence manipulation

Participants were given the following instructions "A great deal of recent research has examined how the average college student describes reasons they are religious (or not religious). Today, we would like you to think specifically your own reasons for your religious beliefs (e.g. *why* you believe what you do). There are no right or wrong answers. ". They were then asked to list either

eight reasons (difficult condition) or three reasons (easy condition). A manipulation check was then administered; participants were asked to indicate how easy it was to generate their list of reasons on an 11-point scale (1 = *not at all easy*; 11 = *very easy*; $M = 7.5$; $SD = 2.59$).

Self knowledge

Next, Participants were asked to think about their true, ideal, and actual selves. Brief descriptions of the true self (the characteristics, roles or attributes that define who you really are - even if those characteristics are different than how you sometimes act in your daily life), actual self (the characteristics, roles or attributes that define who you are in your everyday life (i.e., around your coworkers, strangers, friends) even if those characteristics are different from those that define who you believe you really are or who you want to be), and ideal self (the characteristics, roles or attributes that define who you most want to be even if those characteristics are different than how you sometimes act in your daily life or who you think you really are), were provided. Participants were asked to list the 5 words that best describe their true, actual, and ideal selves. Then, participants were asked to indicate how well they know each of their selves on a 10 point scale (1= not at all well; 10= very well; $M_{TS}=8.49$ $SD_{TS}=2.05$; $M_{AS}=8.41$ $SD_{AS}=2.0$; $M_{IS}=7.79$, $SD_{IS}=2.43$).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

The bivariate correlations between the three self-concepts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Bivariate correlations among variables

	1	2	3
1. True Self Knowledge	-	.60**	.21*
2. Actual Self Knowledge		-	.31**
3. Ideal Self Knowledge			-

Note. [†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

We conducted a manipulation check to determine whether the easy and difficult conditions differed in perceived ease. An independent t-test revealed significant differences between the easy ($M = 8.31$; $SD = 2.33$) and difficult ($M = 6.69$; $SD = 2.60$) conditions ($t(140) = 4.09$, $p < .001$).

Primary analyses

We first conducted a MANOVA that examined the effect of the manipulation on the reported knowledge of the three selves: true self ($F_{(1,138)}=2.10$, $p=.15$), actual self ($F_{(1,138)}=.03$, $p=.86$), and ideal self ($F_{(1,138)}=.337$, $p=.56$). The data suggested that the effect of the manipulation on

perceived true-self knowledge was trending toward significance. By comparison, the effect was clearly non-significant for the other self-concepts.

An examination of the intercorrelations among the self-concepts revealed that perceived true self-knowledge was significantly correlated with perceived ideal self-knowledge and perceived actual self-knowledge (see Table 1). Given this high degree of inter-correlation between the three self-concepts, we conducted a ANCOVA that included ideal self ($F_{(1, 138)} = 3.35, p = .22, \eta_p^2 < .01$), and actual self ($F_{(1, 138)} = 90.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 < .40$) as covariates to isolate the unique variance associated with the true self (see Schlegel et al., 2009). This ANCOVA revealed that perceived true self-knowledge significantly differed between the two conditions after controlling for these covariates ($F_{(1, 138)} = 5.14, p = .02; \eta_p^2 = .04$). Analogous ANCOVAs were conducted for actual ($F_{(1, 138)} = 2.78, p = .098; \eta_p^2 = .02$) and ideal ($F_{(1, 138)} = .49, p = .48; \eta_p^2 = .004$) self-concepts that controlled for the other 2 self-concepts. Neither of these revealed significant differences. Marginal means for all ANCOVAs are reported in Figure 1.

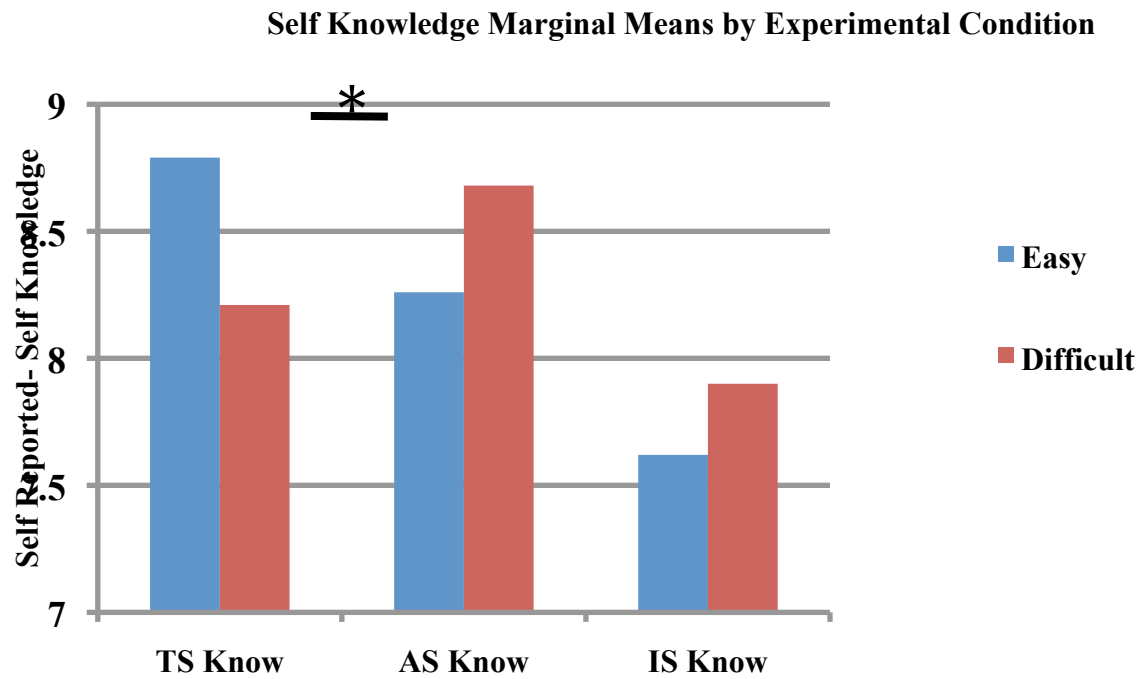


Figure 1. Self-concept means compared by condition using marginal mean attained from analogous ANCOVAs.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Discussion

Summary of findings

The results of the current study suggest that religious confidence has a unique effect on perceived true self-knowledge. We used an adaptation of a listing task manipulation (Schwarz, Bless, Strack, Klumpp, Rittenauer-Schatka, & Simons, 1991) to create temporary feelings of doubt related to religious beliefs in our participants. Specifically, participants were asked to list the reasons they believed what they do and the task was designed to be unknowingly easy (list 3 reasons) or difficult (list 8 reasons). Manipulation checks confirmed that participants experienced these tasks as significantly different in ease. Thus, participants in the difficult condition should be experiencing relative doubt about their own religious beliefs. Participants then rated their own true, actual, and ideal self knowledge. We anticipated that since religion should serve as an influential factor in identity formation, it would have an impact on perceived true self knowledge. In accordance with our hypothesis, when religious confidence was threatened, less true-self knowledge was reported. This suggests that people use their religious beliefs as a cue to whether or not the true self is known.

Implications

Research has found that perceived true self knowledge has a direct impact on daily life and function, such as decision satisfaction and well-being. Thus, understanding the factors that contribute to perceived true self-knowledge is important. The observed relationship between

religion and true self-knowledge provides a new prospective on understanding some of the various components of perceived true-self knowledge. The more information attained on true-self knowledge and the effects perceived true self knowledge has on our personal outlook, the better the ability we have to manipulate its effects and improve our perspective on life (decision satisfaction and well-being). This new development can influence new forms of therapy and personal intervention. Specifically this relationship could be beneficial to religious counselors and those struggling with their religious beliefs and their true-self concept.

Contributions of this study

The significance of this data provides more information on the contributing factors of true self knowledge. The implications of this finding signify that religious confidence can be considered a positive predictor of perceived true self knowledge.

In addition, this novel adaption of the listing task manipulation has shown to be effective in manipulating religious confidence. To our knowledge this is the first time the task has been adapted from its original use to manipulate religious confidence. This is notable because religious confidence and other aspects of religion are often very sensitive and very strongly held beliefs for many people, thus making them difficult to manipulate. The creation of an effective non-judgemental, non-accusatory manipulation of religious confidence may prove to be invaluable to future study of the effects of religious confidence on other aspects of life.

Limitations

Though the study suggested a significant relationship between religious confidence and perceived true-self knowledge, there were some limitations to the methodology that should be addressed in future research. The self concepts (true, actual, and ideal self) were consistently presented in the aforementioned order to participants). Due the recency effect, the first item to be assessed would be the most strongly influenced by the manipulation. In future research, I would suggest that the self concepts be randomized to ensure that the unique difference observed for the true self is not solely attributed to order of presentation.

In addition to the lack of randomization of the self concepts, there was not a control topic to directly compare religion's unique effects on the true self to. Addressing this issue would ensure that the effect observed is distinctly tied to the relationship between religion and perceived true self knowledge. Without this comparison there is the possibility that the suggested effect could be attributed to the difficulty of the listing task in general and not the content of what the participants were asked to list (e.g. the effect could be observed for any listing task that is easy/difficult). Future research should employ a 2X2 design that manipulates both ease/difficult and topic to allow for such a comparison.

Due to the immediate resources available at Texas A&M a population of convenience was used for our sample. This created a homogenous sample, which consisted of predominately eighteen to twenty year old white middle class students. The homogeneity of the sample decreased the external validity of the research on the population at large. This could potentially be reconciled by administering the survey using a crowd sourcing internet marketplace such as Amazon

Mechanical Turk (MTurk) which would provide a small payment to participating subjects. The use of this program would widen our age and ethnicity range thus making our results more generalizable.

Conclusion

Our results suggest religious confidence is an antecedent and a predictor of true self knowledge. As a result, when people felt challenged by a task that they relate to their religious confidence they will simultaneously feel less perceived true self knowledge. Additionally, a new method has been established that have shown to be effective in temporarily manipulating religious confidence. The current research offers empirical evidence supporting this relationship and contributes to our understanding of the effects of religious confidence and the antecedents of the feeling of knowing one's true self.

REFERENCES

- Emmons, R. A. (2005). Striving for the sacred: Personal goals, meaning, and religion. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*, 731-745.
- Emmons, R. A., Colby, P. M., & Kaiser, H. A. (1998). When losses lead to gains: Personal goals and the recovery of meaning. In P. T. P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning* (pp. 163–178). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kernis, M. H., & Goldman, B. M. (2005). From thought and experience to behavior and interpersonal relationships: A multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity. In A. Tesser, J. V. Wood, & D. Stapel (Eds.), *On building, defending and regulating the self: A psychological perspective*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Kernis, M. H., & Goldman, B. M. (2006). A multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity: Theory and research. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 38* (pp. 283-357). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Leak, G.K. (2009). An Assessment of the Relationship Between Identity Development, Faith Development, and Religious Commitment. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 9*, 201-218
- Roehlkepartain E.C, Benson P.L., & Scales P.C. (2011). Spiritual Identity: Contextual Perspectives. In S.J. Schwartz et al. (Ed.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research, 22* (pp. 545-563). New York, NY: The Guilford Press
- Schlegel, R. J, Hicks, J. A., Arndt, J., King, L. A. (2009). Thine own self: True self-concept accessibility and meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*, 473-490.
- Schlegel, R. J., Vess, M. & Arndt, J. (2012). To discover or to create: Metaphors and the true self. *Journal of Personality*.
- Schlegel, R. J., Hicks, J. A., Davis, W. E., Hirsch, K. A., & Smith, C. M. (2013). The dynamic interplay between perceived true self-knowledge and decision satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*, 542-558
- Schlegel, R. J., Hicks, J. A., King, L. A. & Arndt, J. (2011). Knowing who you are: Perceived true self-knowledge and meaning in life. *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin, 37*, 745-756.
- Schwarz, N., Bless, H., Strack, F., Klumpp, G., Rittenauer-Schatka, H., & Simons, A. (1991). Ease of retrieval as information: Another look at the availability heuristic. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 195-202.